

WALK OVER BROOKLANDS. Charles Leech.

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THERE is one farmer in North Canterbury who, if he does not welcome the drought, is cheerfully surviving it. He is Mr. Charles Leech, of Brooklands, Woodend Road, and he remains serene partly because his farm for thousands, and perhaps millions, of years has been drinking secretly from the Ashley, and partly because he himself for sixty years has been teaching his paddocks how to steal water without, drowning themselves.

Eighty-one Years Ago. When his father arrived in this district in 1862 —the first white man to select a holding in the Rangiora district —the flax was ten feet high, and much of the land floating. Today the flax has gone with the niggerheads, and the surplus water passes harmlessly away in hundreds of drains. Mr Leech has tapped as many as thirty springs in a single acre, and while much of the labour and expense in draining his land were put in for posterity —since it did not seem possible that he would live long enough to see his money coming back to him—he is now high and dry on land that in the flush of the season can hardly be eaten bare.

To Lyttelton for Stores. Though he has lived in his present home for sixty-one years, he was born a little further east along the Woodend Road, and he and his sister can remember that their father, after a hard day's work, would set off on foot to get provisions from Lyttelton—before the flax was cleared, before the Waimakariri and Heathcote were bridged, before anybody had a horse to ride, and before it was possible to take a reasonably straight line!

Wild Pigs and Pheasants. As late, comparatively, as 1880 there were wild pigs everywhere in the bush and swamp, and also, Mr. Leech remembers, scores of pheasants. He was then about 22 years old, and he could go out with his gun any afternoon and bring back half a dozen cock pheasants for the table. There was, however, no bush on his own land, the Rangiora and "Maori" forests meeting each other in those days at Woodend.

Other Droughts. Nor is this the only drought he has had to survive. Though he scarcely himself remembers it, the old Cam mill dam was built in 1859, by Mr. E. Steggal, and was bone dry that year for at least three months. It has as a matter of fact frequently dried up since, but 1859 must have seen as long a drought as 1933, and perhaps a longer one.

Floods. But Mr. Leech's most vivid memory is not of drought but of flood. He was ten years old when the great flood came on February 4, 1868, after a continuous S.E. rain over the whole of the South Island. The water came over Chapman's Run in a wave three feet high, and although the damage done was not as great as might have been expected, two girls were drowned at Southbrook. At Timaru, under the same deluge, a man was drowned while looking for his horses, and on the Taieri Plains in Otago a settler was swept

out to sea with his wife and children and never again seen or heard of. Mr. Leech can also remember talking to an old Maori who said that there had been another flood sixty years earlier when it was "all water from the hills to the hills, and the Maori he sail about in a canoe"—a much worse flood, obviously, than that of '68, if the Maori's imagination had not played tricks with him. But even thirty years ago - thirty-one to be exact (March 23, 1902) the Ashley was running a foot deep in front of Mr. Leech's house. In addition, all the gullies and depressions run South-East, and indicate, with the way in which the shingle has been deposited, that there must have been at least one flood, and perhaps more than one, big enough to justify the Maori legend.

The First Train. In '68 there was no gorse or broom in the riverbed, and of course no railway bridge over it, and Mr. Leech saw the first arrive in Southbrook, and remembers that they all had a free ride back to Kaiapoi the day the line was opened to Rangiora—and were not "very sick" as they had all been warned they, would be. He has pleasant recollections still of the first guard, Bill Longden, who was very brisk and efficient, and whose "Now is there any more going on?" meant more to them than any whistle.

Boards Seventy Years Old. Much of the original bush was black pine, and in Mr. Leech's granary floor there are boards, still perfectly sound and free from borer, which were cut 70 years ago for the original Rangiora Church, and moved to "Brooklands" when the church was reconstructed twenty years later. In a further article Mr. Leech will recall some of his early farming experiences, but he has no story to tell about adventures with Maoris, who have always been good neighbours, as they were to his father before him.

FURTHER MEMORIES OF MR. LEECH In the "Gazette" of April 21 Mr Charles Leech of "Brooklands" told how his father settled among the flax eighty-one years ago a little east of the spot on which the Brooklands homestead now stands. In this issue Mr. Leech carries his reminiscences a little further.

Waikuku Beach. My first visit to Waikuku Beach—perhaps the first visit ever made for a picnic—was in 1869. Gresson's Road was not then formed, so we had to walk via Woodend, turning off where the twine works now stand and going past Leggett's and Ivens's houses, the only two then built. The beach was strewn with trees and logs of every description washed down by the Ashley in the great flood of the year before. Some years later, when visiting the beach, we found a whale stranded, which proved to be a "bottle-nose," so we went down the next day and stripped the blubber off, and tried it out. The result was enough oil for our farm machinery for many years afterwards.

The First Butcher. Mr. Leech remembers his father describing the visit of the first butcher, Mr. George Weston, who came from Kaiapoi twice a week with a bullock in the shafts and a horse in the lead. "The road led from the five corners just where the houses now stand on the northern side of the present road, and from there round the back of the Cam Mill and round the head of the Cam stream, which is on the eastern boundary of the High School Farm

and about ten chains from the present road. It then turned to where the Rangiora County Council offices now stand, and it was from this point that my father first looked over Rangiora before there was a single house there. To the east of the offices there was a very large spring surrounded by niggerheads, and from this a small stream crossed the road and went at the back of the house a little lower down and then re-crossed the road again and passed through the paddock on which the first agricultural show was held, emptying itself eventually into the swamp on Brooklands. On the present Woodend Road there were then five wooden bridges—one by the waterhole, one at the mill, one about ten chains further on, one opposite the High School Farm, and one by or near the County Council offices. Niggerheads and flax grew on both sides of them all.

The First Hotel. The first hotel that Mr Leech can remember—it was the first in the district—was situated on the old track to Rangiora. It stood just behind Mr J. Inch's residence, having an accommodation license only, and the first licensee was Mr George Hanmer. The house was later used as a residence, but although it was built of sun-dried brick it was burnt down on September 25, 1880.

First Farm Machinery. Mr Leech has seen some striking changes in farming methods and machinery. At the beginning we had no machinery except ploughs and harrows. The plough was pulled by bullocks and the corn gathered with hooks and scythes, threshed with a flail, and winnowed by the wind. The first machine to cut the corn was the Burgess and Kay, which had fans similar to the present binder, but a man had to walk behind to pull the sheaves off with a drag. Grass paddocks intended for hay were cut with a scythe, and it was no uncommon sight to see three or four men, all abreast, and keeping beautiful time, mowing the grass. Then came a machine called the Tilter, where one man drove the horses and another worked the platform with his foot, and with the assistance of a special rake put the crop off in sheaves. The next great improvement was the Samuelson Sidedelivery, drawn by two horses. This machine was a great relief after the Tilter, which was desperately hard work. Then came a machine similar to the binder, where two men stood on the platform and tied the corn by hand, but it was only expert tiers who could keep the machine going. One day when we were busy tying the grain a man appeared on the scene and told us that they had a machine in America that would cut and tie the grain for us and leave it in sheaves round the paddock. Well, I had my doubts about it, and told him I would believe it when I saw it. In due course it came. It was the McCormick Wire-binder, and was followed by the Wood Wire-binder, both of which had to be abandoned, because the wire with which the sheaves were bound got into the chaff, and in one case that I can remember killed several horses. The last of these two machines had a peculiarity. The revolving arms of the sheaf deliverer had too much speed, and when opening up a paddock would throw the sheaves over the fence into the neighbour's property. Afterwards twine-binders arrived, and I can remember going miles to see the first trial, and coming to the conclusion then that slavery was now abolished (after what we had endured tying grain full of Scotch thistles). Of course we now have a

machine that leaves the corn already threshed in bags round the paddock, and I am waiting to see what marvel will come next.

Early Crops. But the crops have changed as well as the method of harvesting them. When hand-tying was in vogue the country round was very bare of trees, and stacks of wheat, oats, and beans were among the sights of the neighbourhood. On one occasion I counted over five hundred stacks between Southbrook and Woodend. In those days Woodend was noted for bean growing, horse-hoeing and hand-hoeing employing many men. One farmer in particular used to employ 25 hands, men and boys, but when I wanted some seed-beans a few years ago, and asked the late Mr. James Judson if he had any, he said 'No! I don't think you would get a bean in Woodend to-day. One year I threshed over 90,000 bushels.'

FURTHER MEMORIES OF Mr. LEECH. CONTINUING his reminiscences, Mr. Charles Leech said that although he could not personally remember the year 1859, since he was then only a year old, he could remember his father saying that people came down from Rangiora with their tins and buckets to get water from a spring situated close to the house where he now lives. That year also the Maori Bush caught lire and a lot of valuable timber was burnt. (In connexion with springs, which have always been extremely numerous on "Brooklands", Mr. Leech added that he had seen curious results of earthquakes in altering the flow and direction of the water. He had also had much trouble from the same cause in connexion with his system of pipe drains, which had frequently been displaced by earthquakes, and had to be dug up and relaid).

The First Willow Tree. The first willow tree in the district was brought from Akaroa by Mr. Leech's uncle, Mr. Knowles, of Glentui Station. It is now eighty years old and still standing. But in those days it was a landmark for miles around, and many were the cuttings taken from it to different parts of the district.

The First Garden Mr. Leech can still remember the interest of the younger generation in the first garden. It consisted of Apple, Pear, Plum, Peach, and Walnut trees which were bought by public auction on the present site of the Red Lion Hotel. The consignment came from Nelson, and the auctioneer was a Mr. Alport.

The First Cow. He can also remember that it was his father who brought the first cow into the district, but he does not remember what kind of a cow it was or precisely where it came from. It was, however, brought from Lyttelton and purchased from a Mr. Pepper.

Scotch Thistles. On the rich land of "Brooklands" Scotch thistles grew rank and strong and were a great pest, during harvesting operations. My first or earliest recollection of having anything to do on the farm was helping my father look for Scotch thistles. The Act then in force inflicted a fine of £10 for

neglect of thistles, and it was no easy task finding them in the flax. I may say that I have been looking for them ever since, but as they soon spread on to Crown lands the Act was abolished, and I now take this opportunity of warning my fellow-farmers of the rapid spread of noxious weeds all over the country.

Other Pests. But thistles were not the only pests that got out of hand. Sparrows were first noticed in 1870. The common house-fly dates back to 1860, and is supposed to have come in straw used as packing in crockery crates. Swampheens were also troublesome in those days, though they did not do so much damage as would be expected. Where the Cam Dairy stands I have seen the air black with them. They had a habit of plaiting the heads of the corn together, and one would stand on the top and, when danger approached, give the war-cry. Rats were also very numerous and did a good deal of damage in stacks, especially if these stood any length of time. I forgot to say in connexion with harvesting that my father imported the first threshing machine seen in the district, which was worked with horses, though it was not long before steam portables were used. Then came the traction-engine, which was a very great help to farmers, who often had much trouble in shifting a mill with horses which had not worked together and would not pull together

Rangiora's First Bank. CHANGES IN HIGH STREET

AS my previous reminiscences have been appreciated I am tempted at this juncture to give some ancient history regarding the improvements which are at present being made at the corner of High and Victoria Streets. I might say that an area from the site in question to the East Belt, and bounded on the south by Northbrook Road, the whole consisting of 110 acres, was purchased from the Crown by the Torlesse family. However, I am only dealing with that portion extending to Ivory Street which takes in Henry's stables with Paddy's Market, which belonged originally to Jabez Frost, and was purchased by my father from him in 1857 for the sum of £80. In the early sixties, on the arrival of two cousins of mine from England, a quarter of an acre was sold to them for the sum of £40, the dimensions being from Victoria Street to the present site of the Union Bank. Although many years have passed, I can remember quite clearly how, on turning that corner one morning on my way to school, I was much impressed watching workmen engaged in grubbing out a fairly large gorse fence, and otherwise making provision for the foundation of a building which was to be erected as a general store, to the order of Messrs Thomas and John Thompson. As shown, on the photograph, the second portion on the eastern side was built some years later. At the rear of the Union Bank stood a cottage which was occupied by Thos. Thompson, who was married some few years after his arrival, and when the property was sold it was shifted down bodily to the lower end of Victoria Street. From the Union Bank to Ivory Street and down to Henry's Stables there was then only a post-and-rail fence, planted with gorse and the same on Victoria Street. Those

standing on the verandah were all intimate friends of mine, and we spent many happy hours together— Hilton in particular, when he came down to Brooklands to try his hand at shooting pheasants, and jumping from niggerhead to niggerhead. But alas! those days have all gone, and so have the pheasants.

Beginning of Saleyards. Taking further observations on my way to school, I saw the commencement of the Rangiora Saleyards which was built on the edge of the flax; in fact it was all flax down to Northbrook. The auctioneers then were Buss and Hepworth. I have no record as to when they started, but I have the date, when the partnership was dissolved, viz., in September 1868. Buss then carried on alone, and did so for a good many years. During his career there were good yardings of stock every week, viz. 250 head of cattle, several thousands of sheep, and also pigs. The cattle in those days were taken from their respective pens, and sold in the ring. They were certainly a credit to their owners—all good colours and well bred, and it was no uncommon sight to see several mobs consisting of about 30 or 40 head, driven along the Woodend Road on to the Maori Run almost every week.

Better Than Yard Fees. I might mention that there were no yard fees then. On the contrary, during the cattle sale the yardman would stand at the ring gate, and wait for orders. At a slight movement of the arm, and pointing with the thumb in the direction of High Street he would disappear, and in due course arrive with a large jug of beer and several glasses. I leave it to my readers to say whether we have made progress since then or not.